SHAKE THIS LAND

HORIZON

It is easy to get perplexed by the variation and richness in terms of style and approach to philosophical and political topics in Nick Land's writings. Lately the coldness informing his politics has caused discomfort. Personally, neither the coldness of the politics nor the analysis of the fraying edges of present-day modernity alarm me. My interest is mainly aesthetic. For me, the aesthetics of these writings, of course not understood as a science of the harmonious and beautiful, but as the relationship between experience and sensation, is the key to a work which was picked up and amplified by Ccru only to be overcharged, disintegrated, then reassembled and recharged in Shanghai.

Obviously, Land has never been particularly concerned with what appears to the senses, so the reason to think of aesthetics as the key to his work is best explained by a detour.

In a conversation, the American cartoonist Chris Ware notes how memories are always in a state of flux, shifting and sliding over the surface of recollection, until all that is left is the crumbling mortar that originally bound it together. This, he says, is the appeal of fiction writing: like music it harmonizes with the intangible process of memory, offering us melodies to sing in our mind through which we may construct the fables of our own lives, resonant with fears, desires and loves. Thus, it should be obvious that time, at least the experience of time, is not a vector. It is a shape, and it is the writer's aesthetic duty to be sensitive to that shape and sculpt it carefully.

Though Land is no less concerned with memories than with sensation, the musical influences on the writings from the 1990s to the early 2000s mark these texts as acutely aware of and sensitive to time, tempo, rhythm and the fluctuations across the surfaces of the kind of artificial intelligence that is building itself in philosophical texts during the process of writing, and also acutely aware of the point of view of writing itself. The same can be said for the Ccru writings. In this manner they introduce a problematic into philosophy that is related to the problems novelists faced 150 years ago: how to take the novel from storytelling into writing, the major distinction being that the former gives one the facts, while the latter tries to recreate the sensations and complexities of life within the fluidity of consciousness and experience. Though more inspired and formed by developments in electronic music, sci-fi narratives and movies than by the great novelistic revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Ccru writings mark a comparable and just as distinct shift from the clear, systematic communication of analysis, arguments, thoughts, ideas and conclusions to a writing that dives into turbulent surfaces, fluidity and complexities of philosophy's form of artificial intelligence and its synthetic recollection of its own past life and forms.

Now, take note of Chris Ware's revelation of how time unfolds before our eyes and observe how the future's invasion of the present is already at play in vision:

> I recall sitting in a science class and having a weird epiphany: namely, realizing that the time it takes for visual information to reach our brains added to the time it takes for light to travel into our eyes proved to me that we didn't live in the present; everything that we experience as happening 'now' has actually happened a split-second ago but our minds have figured out a way to reverse-engineer this sensation so we experience it as what we call 'the present'. And while we experience that, the future is already occurring.

Taken together, these observations suggest that a forceful factor in these writings is, or at least can be understood as, a blow-up of aesthetic concerns beyond the realm of the senses: aesthetics, the aesthetic dimension, is the fine line, or horizon, where what is open to perception slides into what is either too large or too small to be perceived.

This horizon is, perhaps, best termed a synthetic aesthetics, and the writings are then to be regarded a synesthetic writing in a new sense: the primary concern is not how to create something in writing, but to change the sensational, perceptual and intellectual apparatus and heighten the awareness of the artificial components of a particular philosophical outlook to the point where even the machinic components of thought react to each other. It is not a poetics, but an aesthetics, where intensity takes the role of inhuman or dehumanized sensation, and technological changes reflect a change of consciousness. Texts openly

declared to be machines for intensity rewire intelligence and connect it to questions outside the limits of the human nerve system. Poetics, in this regard, is a kind of blind alley, a detour. Despite a shared commitment to a modernist poetic project involving a rearrangement of the senses, there is no commitment to one particular practice of writing, and no sense in reading these writings as poetry. The texts do not reach out towards the domains of poetry, but to the domain of intelligence, of sentient existence, outside of poetry. The production of writings served as a pathway to this domain, but only to a certain degree.

For that purpose, the heavy reliance on intensity, the recourse to max intensity, presumably proved to be a dead end as it is merely an inhuman variation on one of the problematic aspects of utilitarianism: if what is good, either in life or thought, is the greatest possible amount of states of happiness, pleasure or, as here, intensity, the best life, the best thought, would be one simply lived as or attached to a pleasure- or intensity-producing machine. There is obviously more to life and thought. The excluded surplus, even in thought, craves for attention, the reduction of everything to a question of intensity risks getting caught in an all too human state. A dismissal of a line of thought principally focused on productions of intensity would help to explain why Ccru's implosion lead Land to a further reduction to coldness and a reliance on coldness as a guide. Still, even the anaesthetics of the turn from overheated intensity to the intensity of extreme coldness can be said to be in the domain of aesthetics, just reduced to the domain of zero heat.

PARASITISM

From an aesthetic point of view, with a minimal concern for the finer philosophical details, variations on the same motivation and method can be found in all of Land's writings, namely the absolute modern attitude from Baudelaire and Rimbaud applied to spheres and fields outside poetry: voyages into the unknown to find the new. The new always implies a changed conception of time: to be modern is to depart on voyages into 'risk that stimulates calculation, formalizes agency, and restructures time'.

Of course, these voyages can be subdivided in various ways: there is the voyage to the endpoint of nihilism where Bataille and Kant are gnashing teeth; there are the voyages in conceptual intensities in writings that function as machines for intensity; there are the voyages into non-semantic meaning and inhuman dynamics by the numeral unlocking of occult forces; there is the acceleration into an urban future shimmering on the horizon, not out of view but still out of reach; there are the voyages into inhuman territory by writing from the perspective of terminal capitalism, or 'the real subsumption of society into the risk economy, where it is difficult to identify a lacuna into which an engineered friendliness might be inserted'; there are the voyages into